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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPARTMENT FOR G/TIP, EAP/MLS

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TAGS: [KWMN](#) [KCRM](#) [ELAB](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [TH](#) [TIP](#) [KTIP](#)

SUBJECT: DPM SURAKIART PLEDGES TO RESOLVE SHAN TRAFFICKING CASE

1. (SBU) Summary. Ambassador called DPM Surakiart on April 20 to urge him to press for resolution of the long-standing detention of six stateless Shan hill tribe trafficking victims in Malaysia. Ambassador told Surakiart that this case has been an issue of concern to us since early last year and is likely to be highlighted in the upcoming TIP report. Surakiart said he fully agreed that the victims should be repatriated as soon as possible and had instructed the responsible Thai ministries to do so as soon as the minimum criteria had been fulfilled. He said he had spoken to the Interior Minister about the case two days ago, and would do so again late today to urge resolution. End Summary.

2. (SBU) Ambassador called Deputy Prime Minister Surakiart on April 20 to urge him to press for resolution of the long-standing detention of six stateless Shan hill tribe trafficking victims in Malaysia. The Shan victims have been held since a Malaysian police raid in Johor Bahru, Malaysia, in February 2005. A Thai Cabinet resolution in June 2005 called for the victims to be repatriated to Thailand if they could prove their prior residency in this country. Despite such evidence being provided for most (if not all) of the women, and despite numerous entreaties by national TIP authority Dr. Saisuree Chutikul, the MFA and the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security (MSDHS), the case has been held up by Ministry of Interior officials who claim that Thai law does not provide for the repatriation of stateless citizens. Lower-level Ministry officials are also said to be concerned about the legal precedent that would be established by following the Cabinet resolution's provisions.

3. (SBU) Ambassador told Surakiart that this case has been an issue of great concern to us for some time now, and is likely to be highlighted in the Thailand chapter of our upcoming global trafficking-in-persons report. Ambassador said the USG was well aware of the important strides Thailand has made in combating trafficking-in-persons in recent years, and that we did not want these efforts to be overshadowed by the failure to resolve this particular matter.

4. (SBU) Surakiart replied that he was following the case as the former chairman of the National TIP Committee who had pushed the June 2005 resolution through the Cabinet. He said he agreed fully that the victims should be repatriated as soon as possible, and that he had instructed the Ministry of Social Development and Ministry of Interior to do so as soon as the minimum criteria of the Cabinet resolution had been fulfilled. He said he had not been certain of the number of victims involved, having been told by his staff they could amount to 13 women. (Note: Embassy has been told by International Justice Mission, the lead NGO investigating this case since its inception, that the number is now six, after several women arranged their release informally and returned to Thailand.)

5. (SBU) Surakiart said he further spoke to Minister of Interior Kongsak Wanthana two days ago (April 18) to urge his intervention, claiming that it was the first time Kongsak had heard of the matter. Surakiart said Kongsak committed to look into the matter as soon as possible, noting that yesterday (April 19) was a Thai holiday due to senatorial elections. Surakiart told Ambassador he would call Kongsak again today to check up on the status.

6. (SBU) Comment: This is not Surakiart's first intervention in this case. Laboff previously spoke to PermSec Wanlop Phloytabtim in the Ministry of Social Development on April 12 and was told that Surakiart had sent an instruction to the Thai Embassy in Kuala Lumpur to speed up the repatriation process and that "he would pick up the victims himself." The Thai Embassy had responded that the Ministry of Interior still had jurisdiction over the case, echoing the contents of an April 7 letter sent by MFA Director General Nongnuth to G/TIP Ambassador Miller confirming that "a special commission" had been set up at Interior. After several false promises, we hope that the RTG finally cuts through the red tape and repatriates these long-suffering victims in a timely manner.

BOYCE